

Avian Health Care

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The New Bird Workup

- History
- Observation
- Physical examination
- Complete blood count
- Biochemical analysis
- Respiratory gram stain
- Fecal gram stain
- Fecal wet mount
- Psittacosis testing
- Psittacine beak and feather disease testing
- Polyomavirus testing (breeding birds)

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Health Examinations

As with any other pet, preventative medicine is very important in companion birds. Many diseases are known to occur and more are being discovered all the time. Bird owners must be vigilant to keep their charges healthy. Birds often hide signs of illness as a protective mechanism. After all, a sick bird in the jungle often becomes a meal for a predator. Not even the bird's flock mate wants to sit next to a bird with a target on its back. For this reason, it can be difficult to catch problems early, before they become life-threatening. Regular examinations and laboratory analysis are the basis of preventative health programs in birds.

The first step of this process is a review of the bird's history. During this step, an astute veterinarian can detect many conditions or potential problems.

Next the droppings are examined. The droppings contain both feces and urine and can be a wealth of information regarding health.

The bird is then observed at rest. With tame birds, a brief evaluation of the behavior can be done at this time.

Finally, the bird is gently restrained and examined in detail. The eyes, nose, ears, beak, mouth, crop,



Regular examinations are the foundation of preventative health care for birds.

muscles, abdomen, limbs, skin, and feathers are all inspected for signs of problems.

During the first year, birds should be examined every 3 months. After that, annual examination is sufficient.

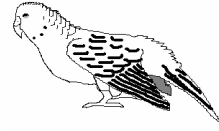
Getting Below the Surface

Even with a thorough examination, some problems can escape detection. In order to better detect these, some laboratory screening can be helpful. About 20-25% of birds that look normal have an underlying prob-

lem. A complete blood count can help determine if the body is fighting infection, or if a bird is anemic. Blood chemistries evaluate the liver, kidneys, pancreas, muscles, and blood sugar and calcium. Gram stains can

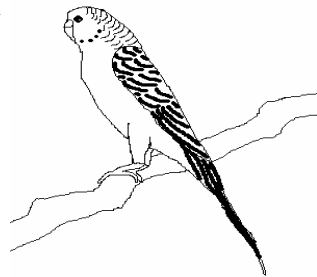
detect potentially harmful organisms in the feces or respiratory tract. Fecal examination can also reveal parasites that can harm a bird.

Recognizing Warning Signs



A bird that looks like this could be in real trouble

Birds are very good at hiding signs of illness. In order to survive in the wild, birds must look their best. If they exhibit signs of weakness, they will be easy targets for predators. Also, their own flock-mates do not want to be near the “easy target” so they will push away a bird that appears ill. Therefore, the instinct to mask symptoms is very strong. Early recognition of illness requires astute observation by the owner.



Healthy bird with upright posture.

changes seriously. While some of these changes may be perfectly normal, others may not. Learn the normal behaviors of birds by reading, watching them, and talking to other bird owners. This will help minimize false alarms.

Specific behaviors to watch for include inactivity, ruffling of the feathers, excessive sleeping, shivering, or lack of interest in normal activities. Incoordination, weakness or seizures are serious clinical signs and should prompt immediate medical attention. If you are unsure about a particular behavior, call us.

Posture

Birds should have an upright stance, tightly folded wings, and a straight tail. Resting birds may hold one leg up or tuck the beak under the wing.

Eyes

The eyes should be bright, clear and alert. There should be no discharge or redness. Birds with a problem in one eye will often face the opposite eye toward you.



Healthy eyes are bright and alert

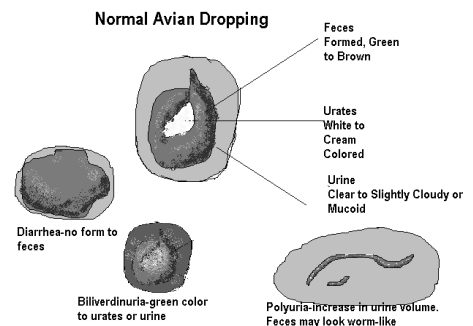
Behavior

It is very important to take any behavior

Droppings

Droppings are a good indicator of a bird's health. The normal dropping consists of feces, urates and urine. Alterations in any of these may indicate a problem. A decrease in the number of droppings, or if the droppings consist only of urates or urine, the bird is probably not eating. Diarrhea usually indicates an intestinal problem. Green urine or urates often suggest liver problems. Polyuria can be caused by nu-

merous problems. The feces' color may change with the content of the diet, especially with colored pellets. Changes in the droppings are best noted when papers are used to line the cage floor and when they are changed daily. Any change should be reported to the veterinarian.



What to Do if You See Something

If you note a problem with your bird as discussed above, call for an appointment. Once a problem is evident, it may already be serious. We would rather deal with the problem early on than try heroics on a bird with little chance for recovery.



Don't let the sun set on a sick bird.

“Don't let the sun set on a sick bird” is a hospital policy at All Creatures.

If your bird is sick, we'll make time for them in the schedule. If we are extremely busy, you may have to wait a bit, but at least someone will do a quick triage to see if your bird needs immediate

support.

After hours, call the Animal Emergency Clinic of Champaign County. (217-359-1977) We have provided basic training to this clinic to provide supportive care for birds until they can be seen at our hospital.

Psittacosis

Psittacosis is a serious infectious disease of companion birds. Clinical signs may not be noticed in some birds. Those showing signs can exhibit upper respiratory infections, conjunctivitis, hepatitis or generalized infections.

One of the reasons this disease is so important is that it is contagious to humans as well. This is



Birds with close contact with people should be screened for psittacosis

why birds that have close contact with people should be screened for this disease.

None of the tests available are perfect for all situations. Some detect the presence of the causative organism, *Chlamydothyla*, while others detect the antibodies the bird makes in response to the organism.

For routine screening, the antibody tests may be the best type. For acutely ill

birds, tests detecting the organisms may be better.

If this disease is highly suspected, it may be advisable to perform both tests. Another situation where this may be advisable is when a person in the household is immune compromised. Bird owners that have AIDS, who are on chemotherapy, have had organ transplants, or are in other ways immune compromised have to be very careful with some of these diseases.

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) is a serious contagious viral disease of parrots and cockatoos. As suggested by the name, the disease can attack feathers and the beak. Affected birds are highly immune suppressed and often die of secondary infections. It affects 'Old World' parrots more than 'New World' parrots, although it can be found in most parrot family birds.

By testing and separating infected birds from other susceptible birds, this disease has been greatly reduced in incidence.

New birds of species originating from Africa, Asia, and Australia should be screened for this disease. Other birds going into homes

with these types should be screened also.

Birds that are positive but showing no signs should be isolated and retested in 3 months. Many will clear the virus and be normal afterward.

Testing and separating infected birds has greatly reduced the incidence of this disease.

Polyomavirus

Polyomavirus is a disease that affects baby birds primarily. Adult birds may transiently become slightly ill, but often it is not noticed. Affected baby birds can die suddenly without any premonitory signs. A diagnosis is usually made by an necropsy



Polyomavirus affects baby birds most severely.

(autopsy).

Since adult birds are not generally at high risk from this disease, our recommendation is that birds going into breeding collections be tested so that they do not present a risk to the

offspring.

Vaccination is another means of protecting birds from this virus. Breeding birds should be vaccinated annually and chicks at 5 and 7 weeks, prior to contact with other birds.

ALL CREATURES ANIMAL HOSPITAL

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At All Creatures Animal Hospital, we strive to provide the best of veterinary care and quality of life for pets of all species. This is accomplished through continuing education of our doctors and staff, education of clients regarding pet care, and the use of progressive, up to date techniques. At the same time, we try to provide convenience for our clients by providing boarding, house calls, pick-ups, and obedience training.

Quarantine Procedures

Quarantine is a word that for many bird people holds negative connotations. It is an abstract concept that slows the rapidly growing collection and increases the work of bird care. However, if used properly and consistently, it is the most powerful tool that a bird owner can use to protect his or her birds. Bird people have a tendency to find great "deals" on breeding stock and buy without taking precautions. This can lead to disaster. The breeder has to approach a new bird with a certain amount of paranoia. It could potentially wipe out the whole flock. Also, any bird that leaves the flock and is exposed to other birds (e.g. at shows) becomes a "new" bird because it may be bringing back a whole host of disease organisms. Quarantine is not an optional procedure. No bird is worth making an exception for. No dealer has birds guaranteed not to be carriers of disease. No vaccination program protects against all possible diseases.

The very foundation of quarantine is isolation of the new, recently moved, or sick bird from the remainder of the collection.

This means avoiding indirect as well as direct contact between the two groups. Ideally the quarantined birds should be housed in a completely separate building. While this is not always possible, at least make sure that there is no passage of ventilated air from the quarantine area to the main collection. The quarantined area should also ideally be cared for by a separate person. If this is not possible then protective clothing should be worn with the quarantine birds and they should always be cared for last. No common usage of cages, dishes, or other supplies should occur. Basically, anything that comes in contact with quarantined birds should never come in contact with established birds.

The length of time to keep a bird in quarantine is variable. The minimum time should be 45 days. From that point, the sky is the limit. The longer the time the less likely the bird is carrying or incubating disease. Six months would be a good compromise between practicality and complete protection.

Prior to release from quarantine, birds

should be evaluated for general health and depending on the value of the flock (not of the individual bird) various diagnostic tests performed. Fecal examinations for parasites, blood counts, gram stains or cultures, and even chemistry panels may be advisable. Also screening for specific diseases that are a problem in a given area or a given species of bird may be useful. Tests are available now for psittacosis, polyomavirus, psittacine feather and beak disease, and others.

The quarantine period should also be used to acclimate new birds to the owners diet, climate, and maintenance procedures. Quarantine is a technique used to control outbreaks of contagious disease, but is also the single most effective way of preventing them